



Testimony of Dr. Jeffrey R. DeSantis

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Before the Health Subcommittee of the

House Veterans' Affairs Committee

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Chairwoman Brownley, Ranking Member Bergman and members of the Subcommittee, I welcome and appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony to you today on behalf of the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA). I commend the Subcommittee for its focus to assist and direct the Veterans Administration (VA) to effectively and efficiently recruit and retain qualified medical professionals to treat veteran patients and improve access to quality health care in the VA system.

I am Dr. Jeffrey DeSantis, member and president of the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA). I represent APMA and the podiatric medical profession, and specifically our members currently employed, and those seeking to be employed, by VA. While I do not represent VA, I do speak for those with first-hand experience and knowledge of practices within VA, as well as knowledge of the widespread disparity between podiatrists and other VA physicians.

APMA is the premier professional organization representing America's Doctors of Podiatric Medicine who provide the majority of lower extremity care, both to the public and veteran patient populations. APMA's mission is to advocate for the profession of podiatric medicine and surgery for the benefit of its members and the patients they serve.

Madam Chair, as you know the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) updated its treatment of podiatrists as a result of passage of the MISSION Act in 2018 to require that podiatrists be treated the same as other physicians with respect to reimbursement and opportunities for career advancement. Though the legislation changed the way VHA treats its podiatric staff, the legislation neglected to address the treatment of the Director of Podiatry Service at VA Central Office. We are asking Congress to address this technical oversight by correcting the treatment of the individual serving in this role to align the position with that of all other medical director positions. We believe that by limiting the role of the Podiatric Medical Director to more closely resemble the role and responsibilities held by the other Medical Directors at VA Central Office will accomplish the

stated goal of the MISSION Act to see that all podiatrists in service to VHA are treated the same as other physicians at VHA. This requested realignment of the position will also ensure that VHA has the resources it will need when recruiting a replacement when the current Director of Podiatry Service chooses to retire. Failing to address this problem will likely result in VHAs inability to successfully recruit a replacement as the current reimbursement structure for the position is inadequate to address physician compensation.

The mission of VHA health providers is to maintain patient independence and keep the patient mobile by managing disease processes and reducing amputation rates. Podiatric physicians employed by VA assume essentially the same clinical, surgical, and administrative responsibilities as any other unsupervised medical and surgical specialty. Podiatrists independently manage patients medically and surgically within our respective state scope of practice, including examination, diagnosis, treatment plan and follow-up. In addition to their VA practice, many VA podiatrists assume uncompensated leadership positions such as residency director, committee positions, clinical manager, etc.

I submit testimony to this committee today to respectfully request that Congress help the VHA and its patients by passing legislation to appropriately recognize the Podiatric Medical Director. Madam Chair and members of the Subcommittees, thank you again for this opportunity.